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SUBJECT: KABILA STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

REF: KINSHASA 873

11. (U) Summary: President Joseph Kabila delivered the constitutionally mandated State of the Nation address before Parliament on December 13. The nationally televised speech fell on the second anniversary of his presidential inauguration. Kabila acknowledged security, social, and economic challenges, slow progress on his five development priorities, and the persistent problems of corruption and impunity. Echoing his October 9 speech to the nation on the eve of Prime Minister Muzito's appointment (reftel), Kabila called for national unity to address the challenges. The leading opposition party criticized the speech as an admission of failure and lacking in specific plan for action. End Summary.

12. (U) Kabila alluded to recent diplomatic initiatives at national and international levels to resolve security challenges in the eastern DRC and improve regional relations. He acknowledged a lack of progress on the five development priorities ("cinq chantiers" in French -- a major theme of his election campaign in 2006) but called them achievable goals nonetheless. He cited a road improvement project in Katanga and the rehabilitation of a water treatment plant in Kinshasa as examples of progress on development priorities.

13. (U) Turning to social issues, Kabila suggested that the recent importation of 700 tractors will increase agricultural capacity and decrease the DRC's dependence on food imports. Kabila reiterated his faith in the judicial system despite its history of corruption. He warned, however, that an independent judiciary is not above the law itself. He saluted the efforts of Parliament in exercising its oversight function. He noted the importance of the role of political opposition to the democratic process, good governance, and development.

14. (U) Leading opposition party MLC ("Mouvement de Liberation du Congo" in French) criticized the speech harshly in a December 16 press statement. The statement called the speech an "admission of impotence" and noted that the peace and security promised to eastern voters "remains an illusion". The MLC also derided Kabila's denunciation of corruption, noting the absence of prosecutions and failure to identify specific measures to combat corruption. Finally, MLC labeled the Kabila presidency a "failure of a militant and partisan exercise of power" and called on Kabila to open the political dialogue requested by the opposition since 2007.

15. (SBU) Comment: Kabila's speech was long on rhetoric and short on substance. He emphasized the increasing diplomatic and political initiatives to resolve the crisis in the east (Note: Not unexpected, as Kabila is now forced to take a diplomatic course due to the collapse of his armed forces in late October when they failed to disarm rebel groups. End note.). The speech acknowledged the potential difficult financial and social times ahead, and included a call, much as in the October 9 speech, to national unity in the face of difficulty. In the end, Kabila made the best of a bad situation, going through the motions of addressing the nation - and fulfilling

his constitutional duties - even though his message was lacking in substance and almost certainly failed to inspire the citizens of his country. End Comment.

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